



Karen Human Rights Group

Documenting the voices of villagers in rural Burma

News Bulletin

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Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, Received in November 2011

This report includes a situation update submitted to KHRG in November 2011 by a villager describing events occurring in Dweh Loh Township, Papun District, between December 2010 and September 2011. This report provides additional information about the summary execution of Saw K---, previously reported by KHRG in October 2011 in the bulletin "Villager executed in Papun District", and also documents the arbitrary arrest of civilians who were subsequently forced to porter for Tatmadaw troops. It also describes de facto movement restrictions caused by the indiscriminate firing of heavy weapons and machine guns into travel routes and agricultural areas surrounding villages as a security precaution during Tatmadaw resupply operations. The report details the ways in which villagers in areas beyond government control engage in covert trade with villagers living in areas under government control and employ early-warning systems to flee Tatmadaw patrols..

Situation Update | Dweh Loh Township, Papun District (November 2011)

The following situation update was written by a villager in Papun District who has been trained by KHRG to monitor human rights conditions. It is presented below translated exactly as originally written, save for minor edits for clarity and security.¹ This report was received along with other information from Papun District, including three incident reports and 4 photographs.²

In the Dweh Loh Township area, there are two groups of people. One group lives under the control of the SPDC Army [Tatmadaw]³ and the second group remains displaced in the jungle. The civilians who live under the SPDC Army's control face forced labour, arrests and killings,

¹ KHRG trains villagers in eastern Burma to document individual human rights abuses using a standardised reporting format, conduct interviews with other villagers and write general updates on the situation in areas with which they are familiar. When writing situation updates, villagers are encouraged to summarise recent events, raise issues that they consider to be important, and present their opinions or perspective on abuse and other local dynamics in their area.

² When these documents have been processed and translated by KHRG and when sufficient information has been compiled and analysed, a full Field Report on the situation in Papun District will be available on the KHRG website. Until then, KHRG's most recent analysis of the situation in Papun District can be found in the recent Field Report, "Southern Papun District: Abuse and the expansion of military control," KHRG, August 2010.

³ In Karen, the Burmese phrases *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) and *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) are commonly used to refer to the Burmese government or to Burma's state army, the Tatmadaw. Many older Karen villagers who were accustomed to using the phrase *Na Wa Ta* (SLORC) before 1997 continue to use that phrase, even though the SLORC has not officially existed since 1997. Similarly, despite the official dissolution of the SPDC in March 2011, many Karen villagers continue to use the phrase *Na Ah Pa* (SPDC) to refer to the Burmese government or to the Tatmadaw; see: "Mission Accomplished as SPDC 'dissolved'," *Myanmar Times*, April 4-10th 2011. The term *Na Ah Pa* was used by the villager who wrote this report and "SPDC" is therefore retained in the translation of this report.

which still continue to happen. The civilians who live outside of the SPDC Army's control live in the jungle. They cultivate hill fields and work together with the civilians who live under control. Villagers in government-controlled areas communicate [with them] and sell them yearly supplies of salt and fish paste. They have communication with villagers in areas outside government control and then [villagers in areas outside government control] flee if the SPDC Army begins active patrols in the area. The displaced people live like this and have lived like this year after year.

SPDC Army military activities

Here in Dweh Loh Township, there are two groups of SPDC Army units that have been active: LID [Light Infantry Division] #11 units and IB [Infantry Battalion] #96. LID #11 units were active in the eastern areas of the Bu Loh Kloh [Bilin River] and the Baw Kyo Traw [Baw Kyo River Valley] and along the Koo Seik – Ka Ma Maung vehicle road.

The LID #11 units that stay near the vehicle road⁴ are sent rations once a year, at which time the soldiers take security measures. When the [supply] vehicles come, the soldiers always fire their mortars and machine guns. This makes the civilians who live near the vehicle road afraid and they do not dare go to their farms, hill fields or orchards, so many of their paddy and plantation crops are destroyed. Now, it is nearly the dry season and the time for the SPDC Army units to be sent food. The civilians are worried that they will be attacked by the Tatmadaw if they go to harvest, work or travel, and they have not dared do so in case this happens.

The SPDC Army [LID #11] soldiers who were active along the Baw Kyo Traw vehicle road and based in Th--- [army camp] always demand thatch shingles. However, the civilians developed a strategy of working together with the Karen [KNLA] soldiers who stay near them when the SPDC soldiers demand thatch shingles and bamboo. [*Two sentences redacted to maintain the effectiveness of this response strategy.*] This strategy was used by the village head in 2010 for the civilians to be able to avoid making the thatch shingles and bamboo that the SPDC Army demanded. Now, in 2011, the Tatmadaw soldiers have not asked for thatch shingles and bamboo again. Columns of the SPDC Army based in Th--- were active between M--- army camp and Th--- army camp. When they were patrolling, if they saw villagers on their way to work, or whenever they saw monks, women, men or children, they would arrest them and make them go with them. Once back at the camp, they would release them.

The villagers who lived in the Th--- and M--- areas were too afraid to go to out to their fields, farms, to work or to travel. They did not dare go and sleep in their farms [field huts]. When the paddy had *der htaw bplaw htaw* [matured], they were too scared to go and sleep [in their field huts], so wild pigs and rats came and ate the harvest and many of the paddy fields were destroyed. When SPDC Army soldiers patrolled and saw villagers travelling to work, they arrested them all. Therefore, none of the civilians dared to go to their fields to work during the time to harvest their paddy fields, even though they knew their crops would be destroyed or eaten if they did not go.

The SPDC Army [unit] active west of the Bu Loh Kloh [River] was IB #96. Their camps were in three places: Meh Way, Gkay Gkaw and Wa Muh. To go between two camps, a small column [of soldiers] was responsible for transporting sick people, food and other [supplies]. They [IB #96] reserved the small column [for this purpose].

⁴ While the villager who wrote this report did not specify here whether he was referring to the Koo Seik – Ka Ma Maung or the Baw Kyo Traw vehicle road, a KHRG researcher who has extensive experience travelling in that region explained that he thought the villager was most likely referring to the Koo Seik – Ka Ma Maung vehicle road here.

The SPDC Army unit [IB #96] had a small column of soldiers that were active between these camps. Whenever they saw villagers on the way to their fields, farms, orchards or to work, the villagers were arrested and forced to carry things for them. Whenever they saw women, men, children or the elderly, the soldiers did not ask them any questions and just arrested them. Now, because the civilians did not dare to go to work, the cows, buffalos and wild pigs have eaten and destroyed villagers' paddy and plantations.

Civilians' livelihoods

During four months between December 2010 and April 2011, the SPDC Army sent enough food for one year to Wa Muh, Gkay Gkaw, Meh Way and Ku Thu Hta army camps. Civilians who live near the camps had to carry [the food] for the SPDC Army, so many of them could not tend to their fields.

Furthermore, the weather was not good this year [in 2011]. There was a lot of rain, so civilians who worked hill fields could not burn their fields, and some could not work on their fields at all. This year, insects also ate paddy from the farms and hill fields so a lot of the paddy was destroyed.

Arrests

The SPDC Army [unit] which was active west of the Bu Loh Kloh [River] was IB #96. On the night of June 6th 2011, at 10:00 pm, 20 to 30 soldiers from IB #96 were going to send food to other soldiers in A---. However, when they arrived in D---, they saw a light near the ground [ahead of them] which they did not recognise, so they shot their guns directly [at the light]. After they fired, they shouted: "*Who's there?*" Villagers Saw M--- and Saw W--- answered: "*We're villagers and we're selling beef.*" After that, the SPDC Army soldiers came and saw the two villagers were, as they had said, selling beef. The villagers were then told to leave their beef shop and to carry things [porter for the Tatmadaw soldiers]. However, Saw W--- only went half of the way before he managed to escape.

Saw M--- arrived in O--- village [after being forced to porter] and before daybreak, while the SPDC Army soldiers were sleeping, he met with Naw K--- and they managed to escape back to their village.

[Naw K--- was in O--- village because] the SPDC Army unit which stayed in Wa Muh army camp [IB #96] had wanted to go to A--- at night, so the villagers there would not know [of their arrival]. When they arrived in Ny--- at 9.00 pm, it was dark and also raining. They saw Naw K--- who had gone to catch frogs. When she came back, she entered her house. The SPDC Army soldiers followed her in silently, then captured her and covered her mouth. After [the capture], they went outside and ordered her to carry [porter] a load. Naw K--- had a seven-month-old baby, but she could not nurse her baby [because she had to porter], which made her breasts become swollen and so painful that she cried the whole way.

Naw K--- arrived in O--- when it was dawn and saw that the SPDC Army soldiers were sleeping. That was when she met with Saw M--- and they managed to escape back to their villages together.

Killings

On September 6th 2011, 27 soldiers of LIB [Light Infantry Battalion] #102, commanded by Lt. Colonel Kyaw Tin Myo and based out of Baw Kyo Leh, went to the villages of L--- and N---. They saw three Karen soldiers and opened fire immediately, but the Karen soldiers managed to escape. When they were firing, they [LIB #102] shot Saw K---, the SPDC-appointed L--- village head, in the hand.⁵ At the same time, they found Saw K--- in a monastery and, without asking him anything, arrested him immediately and accused him of being a Karen soldier. After that, they took him to the village's vehicle road and threw stones at him, but he did not die. So afterwards, they shot him in the head with a gun and left his body on the side of the vehicle road.

Conclusion

At the time of this report on human rights abuses in Dweh Loh Township, abuses such as forced labour, arrests and killings continue to occur. For [dealing with the] demands for thatch shingles and bamboo, the villagers are using their [response] strategies, so [the demands] are decreasing now.⁶

Further background on the military situation in Papun District can be found in the following KHRG reports:

- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, August 2011," (October 2011)
- "Papun Situation Update: Dweh Loh Township, May 2011," (September 2011)
- "Papun Situation Update: Bu Tho Township, April 2011," (September 2011)
- "Papun Incident Reports: November 2010 to January 2011," (August 2011)
- *Acute food shortages threatening 8,885 villagers in 118 villages across northern Papun District*, (May 2011)
- "Tatmadaw attacks destroy civilian property and displace villages in northern Papun District," (April 2011)
- *Self-protection under strain: Targeting of civilians and local responses in northern Karen State*, (August 2010)
- "Southern Papun District: Abuse and expansion of military control," (August 2010)
- "Central Papun District: Village-level decision-making and strategic displacement," (August 2010)

Recent photos from the area are presented in *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010* and *KHRG Photo Gallery 2010-B*. These and other KHRG reports and maps of the region can be found on the KHRG web site at <http://www.khr.org>.

⁵ This incident is described more fully in the news bulletin "Villager executed in Papun District," KHRG, October 2010. The villager who provided information for that report noted that Saw K--- was guiding the KNLA soldiers at the time he was grazed by a bullet, but also documented the date of the incident as September 7th. Readers should be advised that that bulletin contains graphic images.

⁶ The villager who wrote this report did not specify the strategies that villagers have successfully adopted in Dweh Loh Township to bring about a reduction in forced labour demands; in the past, villagers have used strategies of negotiation, evasion, bribery, refusal, discreet non-compliance, partial compliance, and confrontation to minimize the burden of forced labour demands. For specific examples, see *Civilian and Military order documents: March 2008 to July 2011*, KHRG, October 2011, p. 9 – 10.

